I.   **Final Report for the National Leadership Grant #LG-61-11-0354-11**

Institution: Los Angeles Public Library ("LAPL")/Library Foundation of Los Angeles ("LFLA")

Project Title: Creating a Blueprint for a National Digital Public Library Program

Award Amount: $99,675

Total Project Cost: $165,232

Grant Period: July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012

Project Directors: Martín Gómez (LAPL) and Kenneth Brecher (LFLA)

Project Partner: Online Computer Library Center ("OCLC")

II.   **Project Summary: The Challenge**

In July 2011, the Los Angeles Public Library in partnership with the Online Computer Library Center, received an Institute of Museum and Library Services ("IMLS") Collaborative Planning Grant Level II for the purpose of gathering public library leaders to discuss ways to increase their participation in the development of a national public library digitization initiative. The working conference also included representatives from academic and research libraries, foundations, digitization support organizations and technology experts. Over the course of three days the participants were to explore the current state of digitization efforts and determine how best to create a more inclusive national digitization program that would benefit the general public through the nation's public libraries.

Over the past decade, academic libraries and other research institutions have been at the forefront of digitization efforts. These efforts have spawned a whole community of ancillary support organizations and projects. They have also developed strategies and opportunities for the academic library community to learn from one another. Public libraries, on the other hand, have rarely, if at all, been involved in these projects and opportunities. While public library efforts may have resulted in the creation of many exciting local, regional or state-sponsored digital projects, there has been no strategic effort analogous to the activities on the academic/research side, nor is there a national digital strategy for the public library community. By combining the knowledge and experience of academic libraries and other research institutions with the experience and knowledge of the public library community, the working conference was designed to lead to new projects and possible collaboration among the participants. A post-conference white paper or "blueprint" was envisioned as a key deliverable that would serve to promote discussion of this issue and help create a public library strategy for the future.

III.   The Process

The grant period ran from July 2011 until June 2012, and the conference was conducted over a three-day period from November 15-17, 2011 at the Los Angeles Public Library. Guest speakers and panelists with national recognition and experience from various organizations and institutions that have a major stake in digitization projects were invited to speak about their efforts. Technology experts were included to provide relevant expertise. Initially, conference attendance was to be limited to roughly 65 participants whose expenses would be covered by the grant. These participants included library directors and their digital project managers and selected observers. Invitations were also sent to librarians in the greater Los Angeles area who were invited to attend the conference. As a result of the open invitation, the unofficial attendance during the three days of the conference exceeded 200, a demonstration of interest in the topic.

With the award of the grant from the IMLS, planning for the conference began in earnest. One of the prime issues to be resolved was finalizing the agenda and identifying and securing the attendance of the panelists. The project advisors, especially Maura Marx (Digital Public Library of America Secretariat and Berkman Fellow) and Emily Gore (Associate Dean for Digital Scholarship and Technology Services at Florida State University), were extremely helpful in identifying articulate and knowledgeable speakers for the panels. The goal was to have presentations that elicited intense discussions from the audience in a highly interactive environment. It took many conference calls with the panelists and moderators to organize the discussions and ensure that all participants understood their role and were prepared for the conference.

While the agenda was being finalized and panelists were being identified, a pre-conference survey was developed to collect information from public libraries regarding the current state of their digitization efforts and needs. The project advisors and their designees were helpful in finalizing the survey. The data derived from the survey were used to help inform topics of focus for the working conference. An unexpected issue arose when it became apparent that it was not going to be easy to find a comprehensive list of public libraries. After much searching and discussion, the decision was made to send the survey to a representative list of small, medium and large public libraries from across the United States and to the libraries that were members of the Urban Libraries Council. The total number of libraries that received the survey was 1751, and of those libraries, 230 responded. This provided about a 95% confidence level with a 6% margin of error.

The survey identified completed projects, projects that were pending or currently underway, and the ways in which public libraries are using these newly digitized resources to advance new knowledge and community learning tools, or to simply inform and inspire their local community. In addition, the survey identified various funding sources that have been used for public library digitization

projects, highlighted the technologies involved, noted if the material has been made available on the web, and what parts of their collections remain to be digitized. Very significantly, the survey helped identify participants who might not have been invited were it not for their efforts that the survey revealed.

OCLC was the project partner, and as a partner they served as an observer and documenter of the conference, followed by their role as creator of the white paper. The white paper will serve as the primary mechanism for disseminating the results of the working conference, and it is expected to advance the dialogue within the library community. The *blueprint* will be published digitally, and in hard copy and distributed in time for the American Library Association (ALA) Annual Conference in Anaheim, CA in June 2012. OCLC will also host a program session at the ALA conference to present a summary of the outcomes from the conference to the wider library community.

During the planning stage for the November conference in Los Angeles additional funding was sought and obtained from two crucial sources: the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation ("Sloan Foundation") and the Library Foundation of Los Angeles. The funding from these foundations enabled the conference organizers to increase the number of participants and speakers and to support the creation of a conference message board that helped to start the conversation among the participants, panelists and attendees, prior to the actual conference (http://ndpl.lapl.org/).

The message board enabled participants to view the survey results as soon as they were available and allowed various participants to upload articles relevant to the conference and create an ongoing dialogue about the issues raised by the conference's focus of concern. A Twitter feed was also created to enable conference participants to send/make comments and share messages during the course of the conference. Additional private funding also made it possible for organizers to sponsor a post-conference survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the conference.

A major development during the planning of the conference was the emergence and relevance of the newly-formed Digital Public Library of America ("DPLA" – officially launched in October 2011) to this project. Begun by primarily academic and government institutions, the DPLA quickly understood that public libraries need to be a critical part of the DPLA initiative and as a result, representatives from the public library community have been appointed to the DPLA Steering Committee. As the Sloan Foundation is the primary funder of the DPLA, its involvement in the conference was a natural fit.

As envisioned in the proposal, the first session included welcoming remarks from Martín J. Gómez, the former City Librarian of LAPL and the driving force behind this project. Gómez was followed by a keynote presentation by John Palfrey, Chair of the DPLA Steering Committee, who delivered a stirring call for everyone

to join the effort to create a truly effective and publicly oriented digital public library.

Over the next two days the working conference consisted of a day of four consecutive panel sessions. As planned, the panels were organized in the following manner:

- Panel 1 included the results from the pre-conference survey and then provided a snapshot of the current state of digitization in public libraries
- Panel 2 focused on the digitization experience in the academic and research library community, highlighting best practices.
- Panel 3 highlighted the work being performed by various specialized organizations, such as the Hathi Trust and the Digital Library Foundation. These organizations were created primarily by the academic library community to support their digitization efforts/projects and/or to share best practices and resources.
- The last panel of the day provided a framework for summarizing the issues discussed by the prior panels from a public library perspective. This panel included representatives from the Digital Public Library of America Steering Committee.

On the last day, a final session was conducted to enable the participants and everyone in the audience to have a facilitated discussion based on the panels from the previous day. The session, moderated by Gary E. Strong, University Librarian at UCLA, prior California State Librarian and former director of the Queens Public Library, attempted to identify the major issues faced by public libraries within the evolving digital landscape. Information from this discussion formed the basis for the "*blueprint*" or white paper that will serve as both a summary of the topics explored at the conference and as a call to action.

Although the white paper is a summary of the conference it also highlights many of the challenges public libraries face, many of which are significant obstacles to further engagement in the digital library movement. In addition to local funding challenges, all but a handful of very large public libraries simply do not have the expertise or skilled personnel to develop a strategic path within the rapidly evolving digital environment. An unanticipated area of concern rose to the top of the list of major challenges for public libraries: access to third party commercial content, primarily by major publishers.

The conference raised additional questions that the public library community must answer before a clear strategic path can be determined:

- How do we ensure that public libraries' unique issues are addressed as national efforts and public policy issues emerge with even greater frequency?
- How can (or should) the public library increase collaboration between public libraries and other institutions?

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- What strategies are necessary to increase the capacity of the nation's public libraries to achieve their goals to digitize local content and increase accessibility?
- How do we prioritize the materials for digitization when resources are limited?
- Do we start with printed resources, as some institutions/organizations have chosen to do, or do we not limit ourselves by format, as exemplified by Europeana, a European organization (http://www.europeana.eu/portal/) that aggregates metadata for video, text, sound and images in a whole host of formats?
- What does the evolving digital landscape mean for the public and the traditional role of public libraries as access points to content?
- What resources will be needed to support the public library community?
- What policy or practices may need to change in support of these efforts?
- What are the follow-up actions that will ensure that what has been achieved by the conference will have a lasting impact on the state of digitization in public libraries?

IV. Project Results

Resources for the conference were divided between personnel and travel costs, with some expense being used for the creation and dissemination of the white paper and the two surveys. Roughly 44% of the funding paid for personnel costs, including in-kind contributions for staff, additional staff and consulting fees. The work of organizing a conference for over 65 out-of-town guests and a total of 153 "registered" attendees was somewhat labor-intensive. The remainder of the funding provided for travel and meal expenses for the out-of-town panelists and attendees at the conference.

As stated above, the goal of the conference was to begin to identify the issues that would lead to the creation of a national strategy to ensure that public libraries continue to evolve and remain vital community resources in the digital age. The pre-conference survey highlighted the fact that public libraries lag behind the academic and research libraries. Fully 41% of the libraries that responded have not digitized any part of their collections, and 46% do not have digitization strategies. Most digitized collections are quite small with fewer than 1,000 items.

Through the intense conversations that occurred at the conference and based on the results of the conference evaluation survey, it is clear that the participants in the conference learned a great deal from each other. The final discussion on the third day was a wrap-up session that summarized the issues raised and lessons learned from the previous day. From this discussion, the following themes/concepts became apparent as to what must be done to move the issue forward.

A. *Create*: As content is increasingly becoming digital, public libraries must

continue to be able to capture and deliver this content to their users. Libraries are already engaged in digitizing their special collections and sharing content that is born digital. They are also starting to help users create new content. Libraries should not be deterred from digitizing materials because of the fear that technology will become outdated. It's more important to develop a strategy and start working on it. Open source and interoperability are key and will enable others to access the work and have it become an integral part of the wider world of information where it can be migrated to newer technologies as they emerge.

B. *Collaborate*: Everyone has a role to play in this new environment, whether as a creator, publisher, preserver, librarian, technology geek or, better yet, as a combination of the above. One of the more interesting results of the initial survey for the conference was the emergence of small libraries as strong, dynamic providers of electronic information to their patrons. By working within consortia or linking with partners, these small libraries have digitized their collections, made them available online and have linked to other websites to provide a rich panoply of resources for their local communities. Large public libraries with technology and skills can work with those that lack these resources and be paid either through fees or in resource-sharing types of relationships. For example, the conference learned of a library that digitizes content from other libraries and then puts that content on its own web site. Another library is able to fund staff positions by charging fees for high-quality photographs while making the lower quality ones available for free. There are a myriad of ways to make collaborations work if everyone is engaged.

C. *Navigate*: Public libraries must be aware of all the issues and technologies involved with digital content and be involved in policy matters that affect their role and effectiveness. They must be fully engaged to ensure that they are not left out of the conversation. Copyright issues can create great complications for projects, but libraries must not let them lead to paralysis. Librarians must keep abreast of developments in this and other policy areas.

D. *Communicate*: In a world of radically-slashed budgets and increased demands for services, public libraries need to communicate with all shareholders why digital content is not a luxury but core to their mission. It is critical that staff understands and embraces new services. To take on these new responsibilities and priorities in a world of shrinking budgets, public libraries need to reinvent themselves by changing the way they work, the services they provide, and the staff they hire. New service models must be created. Cheaper storage solutions may make sense for materials that have been digitized and are available electronically. A re-trained, reorganized staff will be essential to the ability of libraries to deliver these new services, for libraries cannot continue to connect to their communities if staff isn't engaged at a high level. Libraries must develop sustainable business models to ensure their survival in this new environment.

Funders, both public and private, need to understand why they are funding these

initiatives, and the public must know what's in it for them. The public must understand why it is critical that they advocate for funding to support the new services that they need. All public libraries must be part of the movement. It's not just for the relatively rich and large libraries. Librarians must be able to clearly and persuasively articulate the need and the purpose. Everyone must understand, "What's in it for me?"

As the conference progressed it became increasingly clear that becoming involved with the workings of the DPLA would be a great boon to the public library effort. Though there was some hesitation by public libraries of being overwhelmed by the preferences and needs of academic and other research institutions, these fears were allayed to a great extent. A great many of the participants reached the conclusion that active participation in the DPLA's workstreams was vital.

The final part of the project is the ALA session in June 2012 where the white paper, *America's Digital Future: Advancing a Shared Strategy for Digital Public Libraries*[1] will be presented for discussion. The plan is for this dialogue to continue and for a movement to grow that will ensure the future of public libraries in a digital world where their services are needed and widely used by the people in their communities. The white paper is a valuable source of ideas and information that were shared at the conference and provides a strategy for moving forward. The addenda include the agenda, speaker bios, an attendee list, standards, and the pre-conference survey results.

As stated previously, one important issue arose during the course of the conference that was not included in the original design for the conference, but which came to the fore due to the emergence of a new challenge faced by public libraries. This was the issue of the availability to the public of eBooks at their local libraries. Just prior to the conference itself, major publishers announced that they would no longer license front list titles to public libraries.

EBooks and eBook readers are increasingly becoming part of the national culture, and public libraries must make sure that they are part of the solution. Publishers, authors and corporations, such as Amazon and Apple, are struggling to create a viable business model. As the growth of eBook readers increases exponentially, public libraries must be engaged in this conversation to ensure that the public's interests are well represented.

In the months that followed the conference, Martín Gómez and Patrick Losinski, Executive Director of Columbus Metropolitan Library joined forces to create a public library initiative to become involved in the eBook debate. Their goal is to ensure that public libraries represent the interests of the public they serve as the business model for eBooks is created and remain involved as it evolves over time.

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[1] www5.oclc.org/downloads/design/trends/ndpl-report.pdf

In his message in the white paper, Gómez presents a challenge to "join me and our colleagues in visioning and creating our digital future together. Public Libraries in every community must develop a digital strategy and link that strategy to local, state, regional and national initiatives. We must participate in ongoing discussions. We must invest in new technologies and formats and push our vending partners to work with us. Please lend the unique contributions of your library and your community to the emerging effort to create our national digital library. The communities that we serve are counting on us to make sure that unique, local digital content is widely accessible and that books, films, audio recordings, and other forms of recorded knowledge remain accessible, even as they move to digital formats, to all."